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Fuchs, Joseph, S.J. Moral Demands and Personal Obligations (Book Review)

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The Journal of Religion

show the implications and promise that the imperative to respect and enhance the integrity of life has for practical moral reasoning, one of his five dimensions of moral inquiry? Does the good of ethical integrity offer fulfillment that bears any resemblance to modern or traditional visions of human fulfillment, for example, eternal beatitude in communion with God? Does interpreting the imperative of responsibility simultaneously overcome the threat of total moral relativism and the danger that moral prescriptions will subvert authenticity? How is the Christian tradition, and especially Christ, decisive for this indisputably theological ethic? Schweiker has offered a proposal that should stimulate further fruitful inquiry into these and other fundamental questions. His book deserves the sustained criticism that will help him elaborate on this promising comprehensive proposal.

HARLAN BECKLEY, *Washington and Lee University*.

FUCHS, JOSEPH, S.J. *Moral Demands and Personal Obligations*. Translated by BRIAN MCNEIL. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1993. xii+218 pp. \$35.00 (cloth).

This collection of sixteen essays and occasional papers were all (with one exception) first published in the journal *Stimmen der Zeit* between 1988 and 1992. Only one has previously appeared in English. The papers are gathered under three headings: "The Absolute in Moral Theology," "Historicity and the Moral Absolute," and "Conscience and Moral Objectivity." The volume unfortunately does not have either a subject or author index.

Many of the essays take up topics well traveled in Catholic moral theology since Vatican II. One senses that Fuchs is weighing in his view on a variety of disputes between moral theologians of the preconconciliar manualist tradition with their emphasis on objective moral absolutes and the postconciliar revisionists or proportionalists with their emphasis on the particularity of each moral situation. As might be expected from one of the most recognized voices in moral theology for the last forty years, the subjects are treated with nuance and subtlety, though at times this borders on evasiveness.

This collection of essays ranges from the dense and technical to the spirited and exhortatory, from an analysis of the naturalistic fallacy to pastoral directives on praying the Psalms. If there is an overarching theme, it is the attempt to articulate an adequate understanding of the absolute in morality. While rejecting "absolute norms" of the manualist variety, Fuchs wishes to maintain "absolute values," the specification of which cannot be settled apart from "a relation to the person who acts" (p. ix). Fuchs offers only occasional clues as to what this means; only in relation to humanity "is it possible under particular circumstances to distinguish justified false statements from sinful lies, and only thus can the conscious accomplishment of something evil be justified correctly, either in keeping with the familiar principle of the action with double effect, or through a teleological evaluation of goods" (pp. 67-68).

One of Fuchs's strengths is his knowledge of and attentiveness to some of the evolving language of Catholic Church documents as they relate to moral theology. He displays this in two particularly insightful essays. One discusses the incorporation of the language of "social sin" or "structures of sin" in the work of Paul VI and John Paul II (Fuchs notes that the phrase "structures of sin" first appears in a Roman document in John Paul II's 1987 encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis*). The

other chronicles the church's increasing reliance upon the language of the "dignity of human person" as a basis for human rights (pp. 201-11).

As the title *Moral Demands and Personal Obligations* indicates, Fuchs operates within a framework that understands the Christian moral life largely as a juridical response to demands and requirements. While vigorously challenging the moral legalism of much of the casuistical tradition and its contemporary spokespersons (he names Heinz Schürmann), Fuchs's volume continues to be dominated by a broadly juridical language of "norms," "principles," "law," and "conscience." There is scarcely a mention of the ongoing movement in moral theology to recover (from, e.g., Augustine, Gregory the Great, Aquinas, etc.) the language of the theological virtues, the gifts, and the beatitudes. This is especially evident in the introductory essay "The Difficult Golden Rule."

One disappointment with this volume is that many of the essays cover often discussed (perhaps overworn) topics. Considering Fuchs's historicist emphasis, there seems to be little attention to the new ground broken in the past twenty years (I refer here specifically to the North American context), not only in the recovery of the language of the virtues but also increasingly sophisticated and fresh treatments of issues of practical reasoning, narrative, and of the passions in moral theology, as well as promising developments in the use of Scripture and especially theology for ethics.

Although Fuchs understands himself to be working at a level of theory, the combination of his critiques of inadequate ethical approaches and a seeming refusal to specify concretely his own approach can easily frustrate the reader who wishes to see the practical implications of Fuchs's own views. For instance, in talking about Christian discipleship, Fuchs says: "Following is an absolute demand, but there is not the same demand to imitate Jesus. How we—how I—imitate Jesus today must be discovered innovatively by Christian communities and individuals" (p. 120). If this is an elaboration of the Aristotelian point that practical reasoning always requires "discerning the particular," this is wise and helpful counsel. Fuchs, however, gives little guidance on how to distinguish "following" versus "imitating" Jesus, or on how to think through what is constructively involved in doing this. Further, although Fuchs repeatedly affirms his belief in moral absolutes, he rarely gives examples. One (rather odd) example he does provide concerns a person who kills a child *only* to please a third person. Fuchs notes that such an act is "absolutely and always morally wrong" "because of the 'only'" (p. 49).

As mentioned earlier, the theme that runs through this collection is Fuchs's desire to challenge vestiges of manualist moral theology that oversimplify the complexities of the Christian life. How one approaches this task no doubt depends on what one thinks morally and spiritually ails the present generation. If the legalism of the manualist tradition—an overemphasis on the objectivity of moral norms to the detriment of adequate attention to the necessary "discernment of the particular"—is what continues to plague Catholic moral theology, then Fuchs's book provides a set of helpful critiques of this error. If, however, what is needed is a more constructive account of how to embrace a vision (beyond a set of norms) of the Christian life, then one may not find Fuchs's essays very helpful.

It is in the final essay that we see Fuchs's ethical orientation most clearly. Entitled "Law and Grace: A Theme in Moral Theology," Fuchs discusses Aquinas's understanding of the new law of Christ in both its secondary and primary elements. Fuchs rightly acknowledges that "Christian morality is not primarily law

The Journal of Religion

and commandment," but what is primary is that "the Christian become a new creation in Christ" (p. 218). However, Fuchs goes on to say, "What this means in concrete terms, the Apostle did not say" (p. 218). This reader thinks that the apostle gives some basic guidance about the life exhibited by one who is a new creation; we might begin with the fruits of the spirit. Is this a "fundamentalist" reading of Scripture? Perhaps, but there is a lot of precedent for it in the Doctors of the faith.

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PORTER, JEAN. *Moral Action and Christian Ethics*. New Studies in Christian Ethics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. 232 pp. \$54.95 (cloth).

For some time, Jean Porter has been about the good work of making us conversant with Aquinas's account of the virtues within the context of contemporary philosophical and theological discussions. In this new book she continues the work she began in her *The Recovery of Virtue: The Relevance of Aquinas for Christian Ethics* (London, 1994). We are in her debt for the work she is doing in this respect, as her readings of Aquinas are fresh and powerful, even if I find myself in disagreement with some of the ways she develops Aquinas's position.

This book begins with a quite wonderful chapter entitled "The Moral Act and the Limits of Rules." Drawing on the work of Friedrich Waismann and Julius Kovesi, she reminds us that descriptions are more determinative for our lives morally than rules. Particularly noteworthy in this chapter is her use of Raymond Gaita's important but as yet not properly appreciated book, *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception* (London, 1991). Like Gaita, she develops Wittgenstein's account of following a rule that is dependent on the inner subjective structures of meaning and usage that are embedded in practices themselves. As a result, she is able to avoid the subjectivistic moral psychologies so prevalent in much of contemporary philosophical and theological ethics.

In the next chapter, she challenges the Kantian notion that there is a "moral realm" that is so important to those that think principles are at the heart of our moral existence. In contrast, she argues that the concept of morality is fundamentally an analogical concept. I am in deep sympathy with that point, but I wonder why she thinks she needs a concept of morality at all, and in particular one that associates morality with nonmaleficence. As her own analysis of murder nicely shows, a concept of morality is not needed to know how the description "murder" works.

Her account of the concept of morality becomes important as she uses it to explicate Aquinas's understanding of the moral act. There is much good work done here, particularly concerning Aquinas's understanding of the object of an act. She suggests that Aquinas's understanding of the object is roughly equivalent to the moral notion under which an action falls. She then develops how such descriptions are displayed through giving account of Aquinas's views on rationality and in particular the relationship between practical reason and natural law. She suggests the heart of Aquinas's account of practical rationality is the notion of a quality whose content is derived from the central inclination of human life, including self-preservation and the desire to have and raise children. She argues that Aquinas's account of natural law is not remarkably different from "our" concept of morality as nonmaleficence. I am by no means convinced, however, that Aquinas's account of natural law can be so construed, and I am even less con-